

That's Why I love You, So Don't Be Afraid by Kiku_Takamoto

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Summary:

When Billie is told she needs a preventive double mastectomy due to heighten risk of developing breast cancer, it sends her down a path grief and mourning for her body and her own sense of worth. Thankfully Stevie is by her side every step of the way.

Warning:

Verbal abuse

Implied domestic abuse

That's Why I love You, So Don't Be Afraid

Author's Note:

Confession: Wrote this as a coping mechanism,
please be safe <3

It was any ordinary afternoon for Stevie. It was one of the few days off she had as a pediatric surgical nurse, she was currently on the balcony of her and Billie's apartment enjoying her warm tea and the occasional cold breeze. Living in Los Angeles, there wasn't nearly as many cold days as Indiana, but feeling the cold breeze gave her a slight feeling of home. Now if only Billie could hurry up with her doctor's appointment-

SLAM

The apartment door slamming in followed by their bedroom opening and then slamming shut almost made Stevie jump out of her skin. She gently placed her tea before running to where the bedroom was, just as she was about to open it, the knob stilled. The door was locked.

Stevie started knocking at the door, "Billie? Babe? You in there?"

No answer, Stevie knocked again, "Go away!"

Stevie raised an eyebrow, she wasn't expecting that, "Babe? What wrong? Did something happen at the doctor?"

What Billie said next nearly sent Stevie to the emergency room with a heart attack, "Go away ... I'm gonna die anyways."

Stevie felt her heartbeat faster and faster, what the hell was Billie talking about? Did the doctor say something? Why was she being so vague about details concerning her appointment? What was her girlfriend not telling her?

"Die? What?! Billie, open this door right now!"

"No! I can't look at you, not like this!"

Now Stevie's angered concern melted into soft worry, she felt the nurse side of her was taking over, "Ok ... but at least tell me why you are so upset?"

"That asshole wants to mutilate me! Wants me to look less of a woman!" Billie cried out; her voice sounded horse. It was the first time Stevie noticed; it was apparent that Billie had been crying for a while already. Which made her wonder how long Billie was actually at her appointment or if she had other appointments that she never informed Stevie about.

This was alarming however, she wasn't expecting Billie to accuse her doctor of hurting her, "'Less of a woman?'"

"I know how much you love the twins ... now I'm gonna loss that too ..." Billie trialed off. That was all the information Stevie needed. Her

brown eyes grew larger then she thought possible. At that moment Stevie saw all the pieces coming together.

“Billie,’ Steve gently but firmly stated against the door, ‘Did the doctor say you need a mastectomy?’”

“See!? Even you sound disgusted!” Billie accused, now sounding close to having a mental breakdown more so at the thought of what Stevie would think of her. Stevie wondered if the surgery itself even bothered Billie or if it was what Billie thought Stevie would think of her having the surgery. Stevie was having none of this, she would not let Billie deal with this on her own. Billie needed a shoulder to lean on and Stevie would be the rock she needed.

Stevie knocked on the door again, Billie went silent, “Billie Hargrove, answer me. Did the doctor say you have breast cancer or have mutation of the BRCA gene?”

Billie paused for a second before speaking again.

“BRCA. ... apparently it runs on both sides of my parents’ family, my own mother had breast cancer,’ Stevie wasn’t expecting that, then again there was a lot about Billie’s family she didn’t really know despite her best efforts to get the blonde to open up more. The choked sobs that came out of Billie’s mouth quickly bought. her back to reality, ”The doc wants to remove my breasts and then perform reconstruction ...”

“Ok, that’s very normal ... but babe, why do you think I won’t find you attractive- “

“You love my breasts, don’t you?!” Billie wailed, the sound of her voice and her cries broke Stevie’s heart, ‘What the fuck do you think?! I might as well be only half a woman!’”

“That’s not all I love about you,’ Stevie firmly declared. Billie sniffed but didn’t say a word, Stevie had her attention. Stevie knew exactly what she wanted to say to Billie, ‘I love your out-of-control blonde hair, your blue eyes, those gorgeous tattoos on your body, your nice round ass- ‘

Before Stevie could go on anymore the door was thrust open. Stevie would have fallen on her face had Billie not been right at the entrance. The slightly taller girl looked at Stevie with bloodshot eyes and ruined eyeliner that ran down the sides of her face. Instead of staring at Stevie, Billie hid her face in the crook of Stevie’s neck. Stevie hugged Billie back, not caring that make up was getting all her oversized t-shirt. All she cared about was the stiffened cries and sobs that Billie let out as her body shook from the amount of stress she had been put under.

‘Oh babe,’ Steve whispered, using her free hand to rub Billie’s back in circles, ‘You’re gonna be ok.’

‘You want me to call Max?’ Billie nodded slowly; she didn’t say a word. She wouldn’t even look at Stevie, it was as if she was caught cheating or doing something else just as shameful. Stevie’s heart broke at the thought of Billie believing she did something wrong. You can choose to cheat or be unfaithful, but you can’t choose what set of genes you are born with. If anyone dared to make Billie feel like it was her fault, Stevie would make a brand-new nail bat just for the occasion.

‘Ok,’ the two separated as Stevie led Billie back to their bed. She leaned over kissing the sun kissed skin that was peeking out of the white fluffy sheets, ‘I’ll be back, ok? Just relax for now.’

Stevie paced around anxiously as she waited for Max to pick up the phone. The more the phone rang, the more nervous she felt. Sure, as a nurse she was both the bearer of good and bad news. Sometimes she was nervous because she had to tell parents that their child’s surgery was success but that they would need to stay for a week, other times she had to tell parents that their child had passed away during surgery. What she learned was this; people grieved differently and each patient, plus their families, had different ways of grieving. Some cried, some made nervous little jokes, some took their anger out on staff and at times some would even deny the news outright. Because in many cases fantasy and make believe were easier to deal with then the harsh reality.

Every patient grieved differently, and each patient deserved both physical and emotional care. Billie was no exception.

Stevie felt her heart pound faster as she knew the phone was close to not ringing anymore, this was not news she wanted to deliver over an answering machine, ‘Come on, pick up, pick up, pick up- “

The phone finally stopped ringing.

“Hello, this is Max-

“Hey, Max?”

“Stevie?’ Max sounded excited to hear Stevie after a long while, ‘Hey, it’s been a while. What’s up? Billie was supposed to call this weekend- “

“Max, that’s what I need talk to you about,” Stevie interrupted. She knew it was better to cut to the chase rather than drag it out. Max had a right to know.

Max paused sighed heavily at the other end, “Oh God, what happened?”

“Nothing bad happened, just Billie found out she has a higher chance of developing breast cancer due a gene mutation she has,’ Stevie calmly explained, it was times like this she was happy to have so much practice as a nurse. If she was still in school, she probably would have hung up by now, ‘She is getting a mastectomy in order to lower her chance’s so she’s less likely develop breast cancer later on in life.”

“So, if it’s not a big deal then why do you sound so upset?” Stevie could tell Max was worried as hell but was trying to keep it together. For siblings who had separate pairs of parents they sure were alike, their stubbornness and hiding their real feelings was especially apparent.

“Max ... Billie is feeling self-conscious about this procedure. If you could show her some support that would more than enough- “

“Save it, I’m taking whatever plane is available. When is the surgery?” Stevie breathed out in relief, she thanked God that she and Billie didn’t have to deal with this alone. Especially for Billie’s sake, her girlfriend deserved all the support she could get.

In the other room Billie allowed more tears to run down as she laid in bed listening in on Stevie’s side of the conversation. Not even the warm sheets or Stevie’s perfume laced blankets could comfort her at a time like this. The thought of surgery terrified her, but the thought of having a ticking time bomb inside her chest sent her on an edge that even she couldn’t describe. At least whenever she raced in her Camaro she was in control, in this case control was the furthest thing she had.

At 27, she still cringed at some of the stuff she did in high school, it took her so long to get back on her feet and to have stability in her life after screwing up so many times. Just two years ago she thought she found it after completing her apprenticeship at the tattoo shop in Santa Monica. Now she felt like she stepped right into another mine field, expect this was mine field that she couldn’t just walk away from, it followed her everywhere she went.

She was so lost in her thoughts she didn’t even hear Stevie enter the room. She didn’t even fight back as Stevie wrapped her arms around Billie in herself made cocoon of blankets.

“You with the sad eyes, don’t be discouraged, oh I realize, it’s hard to take courage ’

Stevie sang softly, Billie felt her throat tighten. She knew this song

anywhere. It was the slow dance song she and Stevie danced to at the prom when they still lived in Hawkins. She remembered every little detail.

‘ In a world full of people, you can lose sight of it all, the darkness inside you’

It wasn't your typical prom or school dance like most couple would recall. The 80's unfortunately wasn't a kind time to be gay or out of the closet, but that didn't stop Billie or Stevie from having their prom. They both claimed they 'had no date' and went together as 'friends', no one was none the wiser.

‘ Can make you feel so small , show me a smile then, don't be unhappy, can't remember when’

It was almost funny, Hopper, Max and El had taken her dress shopping since Neil didn't want to waste his hard-earned money on a dress Billie would only wear one time. She was anxious to see Stevie in her prom dress, she was so nervous that Joyce had to do her hair because she shook so much.

‘I last saw you laughing, this world makes you crazy, and you've taken all you can bear’

When she finally saw Stevie, she felt her heartbeat even faster. The gorgeous brunette was wearing a dark red dress, Billie's favorite color. Ironically, Billie had chosen to wear dark blue, which was Stevie's favorite color. At that moment everything stopped, all she saw was Stevie. Hell, she could be bald wearing a potato sack and she still would have fawned over Stevie that night.

‘Just call me up, cause I will always be there’

Stevie was the first-person Billie ever meet who was interested in more than just her looks. Stevie loved Billie’s drawings, her self-made clothing and her athletic talents. Hell, the first time she made out with Stevie she had no make on, her zits, red marks, freckles and everything else was on show. That didn’t stop Stevie from tongue wrestling with her.

‘And I see your true colors, shining through, I see your true colors’

That night they danced behind the bleachers after sweating so much from dancing like maniacs on the main floor. As the slow music played, Stevie and Billie started slow dancing to true colors playing in the gym. Despite not being able to dance with everyone else, it didn’t make it any less special. Then a halfway through the song, Billie pulled Stevie outside the gym to her Camaro.

‘And that’s why I love you’

Both were laughing and giggling as they arrived at Stevie’s house while running into her backyard. Billie was so busy teasing Stevie about still being a ‘goodie two shoes’ even at prom, she didn’t notice that Stevie had started back her into her pool.

With a yelp of shock Billie fell right into the pool. The moment she resurfaced she was met with chuckles from Stevie as Billie spat out water, “You little shit!”

'So don't be afraid to let them show, Your true colors'

Billie then grabbed Stevie's arm and all but dragged her into the pool with her. Stevie let out a yelp of surprise and horror as she entered the pool but was relieved to see Billie holding her up after dipping both of them into the water. Even her ruined hair, make up and soaking wet dress didn't distract her from watching Billie with curious eyes.

'True colors are beautiful, I see your true colors'

Billie smiled at her, this smile however was the gentle and sweet smile that the public never saw. It wasn't the cocky smile that she normally wore, "I wouldn't let you drown in the pool, Pretty Girl. I'll be your lifeguard any day of the week, remember?"

Stevie blushed brightly, she had only just told Billie recently why she was so afraid of water, especially her pool. All no thanks to Tommy Hagan, who thought it was so fuckin' funny to push Stevie into the Hawkins community pool. Billie spent the whole day comforting Stevie afterwards and in her stressed state the brunette cried and confessed her fears. For the next few weeks Billie slowly helped Stevie go into her pool, never once letting her go, until she could safely dip Stevie into the pool, which always earned laughter and delight from the petite girl.

'Shining through, I see your true colors'

In the pool Stevie and Billie shedded their dresses as Billie continued

to hold her girlfriend up. The two continued to make out, they both looked like hot mess expresses, but neither couldn't care less. It was the most romantic, tender and erotic moment of Billie's life at that point. She was the messiest she had ever been, yet it was the best night of her life. All thanks to Stevie.

Soon the singing began to muffle out as Billie leaned into girlfriend's warm body. Stevie just held on as she let Billie cry out her frustration, she didn't say anything she just let the blonde cry. Despite showing a tough exterior, Billie had an interior that needed just as much love and care as any other patient Stevie saw at the hospital.

She would be there every step of the way for Billie, no matter what.

- A Few Weeks Later -

"Ok Miss Hargrove, are you ready?" the surgeon smiled down sympathetically at Billie. She wanted to punch the man, he was acting all calm and casual while she laid on the gurney with tubes all in her arms, her hair hidden away in an ugly hair net and hospital gown that would be open and available for him and his fellow surgeon to mutilate. As far as she was concerned, he was a butcher with a fancy title.

Instead, Billie opted to nod her head slowly, the medication made it difficult for to come up with any threats. She turned to Stevie who was holding her hand tightly while clutching onto her necklace. Despite the night before sex and the long hours of comforting during her crying spells, Billie felt nowhere near ready.

Stevie leaned down to Billie's ear, whispering, "I'll be right outside, babe. When you come out, I'll be right in the room with you."

Billie nodded as she felt Stevie let go and the doctors roll her down to the surgery room. She didn't even notice herself going in and out of consciousness, she felt to empty on the inside. The only thing that gave her comfort was knowing her sister and her girlfriend were outside waiting for her.

- 6 Hours Later -

Stevie was asleep in the waiting room. She refused to go home, sleeping in bed without Billie felt wrong, she knew her girlfriend was scared to death when it came to surgery. She wasn't going to leave her there, even Max couldn't convenience Stevie to leave for a couple of hours. She felt herself being nudged awake.

Max was standing right above her with coffee and a bag of doughnuts, "Here, I know surgery will be over soon, I figured you wanted to be bright and awake when Billie came out of surgery."

"Thanks," Stevie smiled tiredly. Her eyelids felt heavy, she knew she probably looked like a hot mess, but she couldn't bring herself to care. She just had to know Billie was ok.

"Stevie?" Stevie looked up at Max, who looked at Stevie seriously, 'You won't feel differently about Billie after surgery right? It's just ... Neil was an asshole to her mom because of it and I don't want Billie to live through that too- "

“Max,’ Stevie interrupted, giving the redhead a small smile, ‘I fell in love with Billie because she is Billie. Beneath that tough bad girl exterior is a person who do anything for me and would deck anyone who even looked me the wrong way.’

The brunette leaned in holding Max’s hands, ‘Believe me, I will be more than fine. But we need to give Billie all the confidence she needs after surgery and I intend on making her like a million bucks. This surgery actually makes me feel slightly happy- “

“Why?” Max gawked looking at Steve like she had lost her mind.

“‘Cause I love her so damn much,’ Stevie choked, Max felt her own eyes water up, ‘I know its selfish but ... but when I heard about her family history, I was so scared I wouldn’t even have the option of growing old with her. Now knowing that her chances are down by 95% makes me happy, ‘cause it means she will be with us so much longer.’

Max saw tears escape Stevie’s eyes, ‘In my job as a nurse, I’ve seen so many children and teenagers die because they think they can’t have a good life from surgery or other invasive treatments, some by their own choice but most the time the parents can’t deal with knowing their child might be disabled, loss their hair or require a blood transfusion that violates their religious beliefs.’

The words now made Max have tears in her eyes, she knew the job of nurse was tough, but this wasn’t territory she never even thought of or knew. She really hated people sometimes, Stevie wanted to save children but all it took was for the parents to completely destroy that and take away any chance for children to live or potentially survive. She grabbed Stevie’s hands back as the girl choked up even more, ‘I

was so worried Billie wouldn't get surgery to survive. The moment she confirmed she would get surgery I was so happy cause ... cause ... cause I already seen enough patients die from not getting preventive treatment.'

Stevie was almost choking from her tears at this point, 'I-I didn't want to see Billie die that way either. Not like this.'

Max sat closer to Stevie, giving the brunette a tight hug. Neither said anything, they just held each other. It wasn't until they heard footsteps coming their way that they separated from each other.

"Relatives for Miss Hargrove?"

Stevie and Max immediately stood up. The same surgeon from earlier was there in clean scrubs. Stevie didn't hesitate to ask, "Doctor, how is Billie?"

"She did perfectly fine. She is in intensive care, but she will only have to stay for two nights."

"Thank God," Max breathed out in relief.

"She will need to take it easy for a few weeks but by 8 weeks she should be able to move around without discomfort."

"Can we see her now?"

- Billie's Room -

"Shit ..." Billie felt like her chest weighed a million pounds. No period could ever compare to the sensitivity she felt on her chest. As she looked down, she was surprised to see two mounds still attached her chest. They looked almost exactly the same as before, granted smaller because there was now tissue expanders in the place where her breasts once where, but they weren't flat either, 'Shit, they look exactly the same. God, they better not as hard as rocks when I get implants."

Billie was now secretly grateful that Stevie had forced her to quit smoking two years ago. She learned from her doctor that had she still been a smoker like she was in high school, she would have had to get breast reconstruction later on, or even have multiple surgeries due to possible complications that would result from health problems associated with smoking. She now wanted to give Stevie the best sex she ever had for getting on her case about quitting all those years. Now all that awaited her was follow ups concerning surgery that would allow her to get the actual breast implants and the actual surgery itself in 1-2 months. She was spared more visits mainly due to the fact that Stevie was a nurse herself and was more than capable of filling the tissue expanders for Billie.

Now Billie felt stupid for crying about surgery, she thought she would feel completely different after having her breasts removed but instead, she felt no different. Instead, she felt relief, like a lot of weight was taken off her chest.

"Well, you did have a ticking time bomb removed from your chest, dumbass," Billie scolded herself mentally. Still, she couldn't bring

herself to feel angry, she could only think of that day Stevie cuddled with her bed when she delivered the news of her mastectomy.

She also remembered being in the waiting room of the specialist office, she didn't tell Stevie she really going to a specialist, she didn't want to worry her girlfriend for no reason. But as soon as she entered the waiting room, she regretted it. Behind her a couple seats away was a woman with her husband. Sharing that she needed the big M word to prevent the dreaded C word.

"But honey, I need the surgery to prevent cancer. My mother, grandmother, aunt and sister all had it- "

"So, can't you just deal with cancer when the time comes? And why get surgery for something you might not even get?" her husband seethed. The disgust in his voice made Billie nearly sick enough to run to the bathroom.

"Sweetheart, you know my grandma and mother both died from it. The surgery prevents it up to 95% and they have reconstruction- "

"You know I don't like it! If you get this surgery, you won't be a real woman anymore if you get this! You hear me?!' Billie was going to be sick; she could have sworn she was hearing Neil yelling at his mom. As a little girl her mother had gotten a double mastectomy when she was diagnosed with early signs of breast cancer, but instead of support, Neil yelled at her in rage for not 'asking his opinion' before she got surgery. As if his need to see his wife's breasts was more important than her damn life. He might as well told her, 'how dare you get sick and want a surgery, so you don't die.'

‘Get this surgery and I will have a divorce lawyer ready!’ with that the husband marched out, all but slamming the door shut. The poor woman was crying rivers now, everyone in the room was so shocked they couldn’t move or utter a sound. It wasn’t until a nurse came up to the woman that Billie realized the doctor was ready to see her.

At that moment Billie all but prayed that she wouldn’t need surgery. She didn’t care if she died from getting cancer later in life, if Stevie left her, her life was as good as over. What if Stevie was disgusted by her just like that man in the waiting room?

Now looking back, she felt ridiculous for ever even thinking that Stevie was capable being cruel like that, especially considering that Stevie took care of children at the hospital for a living. If there was anyone who would be understanding about needing a medical procedure it would be her. Speaking of Stevie, a familiar head of brown hair entered the room followed by a redhead she knew from anywhere.

Now that her sister and girlfriend were here, everything felt right in the world.

Stevie sat by the nearest chair to Billie, she smiled at the drugged out state the blond was in, “Babe? Babe, how are you?”

“Feel like shit,” Billie mumbled, Max rolled her eyes at her sisters attempt of being tough (especially with tubes up her nose and her hair looking like it got hit by a tornado) but at the same time she was happy to see that her sister was ok.

“Oh, you,” Stevie chided, kissing Billie’s tube covered hand. Billie couldn’t help but smile, whether it was because she knew Stevie would stay by her side or because the scary monster that she was forced to confront was finally gone and out of her life, or if it was the amount of medication, she was on, she didn’t know. All she knew was she was happy; did she miss her breasts? Hell yeah, but time and help from those close to already helped her so much. And with people like Max and Stevie by her side, Billie knew she would ok.

-At Home, 3 ½ Months Later-

For Billie, life was generally back to normal. She just had her tissue expander removed and in its place were breast implants that matched her old double D size. It was a nearly 3 months process (if you don’t count the number of appointments, she had before and after surgery) and it had finally come to an end. Billie even had a fellow tattoo artist, Angela, tattoo nipples on the new breasts since Billie opted not have any more surgery. She couldn’t afford to spend even more time away from work, plus she wasn’t exactly fond of being sore all the time. If she wanted to be sore all the time, she would visit Neil more often.

It was odd, she assumed she would feel depressed or even resentful for needing the surgery, yet she had none of those feelings. Once again Stevie was right, people react differently to the same medical procedure. She heard from other patients, some refuse to even have sex with their partners, some felt mentally destroyed by the mere thought of the procedure while others felt indifferent by the procedure. She also found out that the patients’ reactions to the surgery also heavily depended on how their husbands or family reacted to the surgery, if the family was supportive the patient was more likely to be positive, however they were negative the patient would be more likely to feel negative about their surgery.

“Pretty girl?” Billie yelled out playfully. For weeks Stevie had to help Billie get dressed due to how sore and limited her movement was, as of now Billie could fully dress herself without needing too much help (medication was a blessing), but it was more fun for Billie to harass Stevie.

Stevie entered the room looking at the blonde with pure annoyance, “Yes?”

“Can you help me? Nurse Harrington?” Billie asked, grinning at the slightly shorter girl. Stevie rolled her eyes, she was happy that Billie was more like herself, but couldn't she dress herself at least?

“Billie, I saw you put on a bra on your own,” Stevie stated bluntly.

“Please,” Billie outed, pursing her lips up. Stevie groaned walking up to Billie before slowly taking the bra off from its hooks, it had more padding and protection in comparison to normal bra's. It wasn't always the most comfortable to take off, so Stevie fully understood why Billie wanted her to help the first few weeks, but by now she knew Billie was just being a little shit. Oh well, at least she was acting like her old self.

“You're unbelievable.”

“Love you too, Stevie,” Billie smirked.

As Stevie undid the bra, Billie's breasts were in full view of the mirror

in front of them. Stevie looked at them curiously. She remembered not really paying intense attention to them in the last weeks due to her schedule and Billie's soreness, which required medication and exercise to maintain, but this time was different. She slowly slid her hands to Billie's chest before gently resting her hands right below the breasts. Stevie could feel the goosebumps form on Billie's skin that was spared from surgery.

"Babe,' Stevie cooed, gently massaging the skin below her hands, 'Tell me, how do they feel?"

"They feel ... ok, I guess," Billie choked enjoying the circles that Stevie massaged into her skin. She couldn't feel any sensation in her actual breasts but watching Stevie gently and tenderly touching her new breasts just like she always did was making her feel hot on the inside.

That was probably the biggest downside for her. Sure, in the 90's they knew more about nerve regeneration than they did when her own mother the surgery done, but the thought of waiting two years for nerves that might not even feel the same as before her surgery scared her. Secretly, she dreaded the thought of not feeling arousal through her breasts like before.

Stevie seemed to read her mind, she slowly moved her hands down the Billie's hips, and travel beneath her pj pants. The same warm hands coupled her ass cheeks like a baker kneading bread dough, Billie felt her heart race faster and her folds become more and more wet, "But the real question is, do you feel really nice?"

"Depends,' Billie rasped, she could feel Stevie getting more and more tense. Billie rolled her head back into Stevie's neck, 'How much of a

work-out can your fingers handle?”

Before either could even think, both felt their bodies hit the sheets of the warm cloudy covers that hugged their bodies perfectly. It was so hot and stimulating that Billie lost count of how many times she came and how many times she drove Stevie's crazy with her fingers and tongue. It wasn't her fingers, her tongue or even the toys they had in the room that made it so special, rather it was what the caring and loving words that the brunette whispered in her ear.

“I see your true colors, and that's why I love you, so don't be afraid ... please don't be afraid Billie.”

In other words, no matter the long-term challenges ahead Billie knew one thing, as long as Stevie was there besides her, she could conquer any challenge that came her way. All thanks to those sweet words.

Author's Note:

Please be safe, get your health checked and consider getting genetic counseling, especially if you have strong family history of cancer! That goes for you too gents! Men and woman can both get breast cancer (according to the CDC ,1 in 100 diagnosis are men) and there are options available for both treatments and preventive care.

Please take care of yourself, you are brave <3